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ABSTRACT

To make adequate use of mass media for children's education, we must recognize that the medium is the message, that the conveyer is the content. The medium itself changes behavior, learning and growth patterns of the child. For example television itself teaches a special kind of visual awareness and enhances the ability to relate non-immediate mediated experience to live experience. Once this is recognized, we can begin making better use of media for educational goals. Our educational goals for children are: to prepare individuals for effective participation as citizens; to encourage self-realization; to develop vocational skills; to foster ethical and aesthetic growth. But educational media have not done much to help meet these goals. Educational programming aimed at children has been inadequate. Changes are needed. We should start by recognizing the considerable impact of TV on youth, and by agreeing that a primary goal of TV should be to meet children's educational needs. (MG)

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ADDRESS TO THE AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
"EDUCATIONAL REALITIES"

at the
Americam Hotel, New York City
August 9, 1966

"Television and Childhood Education"

by
Dr. Robert L. Hilliard

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Washington, D.C.

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ADDRESS TO THE AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

"EDUCATIONAL REALITIES: THE TOOLS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR PROGRESS"

Americana Hotel, New York, N.Y., August 9, 1966

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As the rumblings of revolution in education--in the school and outside of it--grow louder and louder, one discordant note continues to detract from the swelling rhythm of development. On one side the so-called scientists and engineers, and on the other the professed philosophers and educators. And the controversy--in which you are all involved--is whether the tail is wagging the dog, or, in more appropriate modern terms, whether we are going to the moon for a purpose or is it an end in itself.

What is the relationship of content to media? Have we lost sight of what we are saying, in our efforts to find better and better ways of saying it? Is--how shall we put it?--the medium the message? (No, that's a slogan that surely could never catch on. Let's try another.) The conveyor is the content.

Some people would be surprised at such a statement. Such a statement would seem to many to be startling, maybe even revolutionary, and in the broadcasting field--maybe even controversial. Some people are surprised to hear statements that the mass media are more than means of transmission, that in themselves they can affect thought and feeling. What surprise greets allegations that electronic communications have a profound effect as substance as well as process!

The surprise to me is that there is surprise. Why, we have known that this was so ever since the first human uttered the first sound or danced the first dance or painted the first picture on the wall of a cave to communicate something to another human.

Hasn't music always been communicated in just this manner? Isn't the medium of music also the meaning?

Only two decades ago Picasso wrote a monograph on the time-space concept, in which he showed how, through the development of new media of transportation and communication, we no longer see the world and its objects through a limited, fixed, single-plane viewpoint, but we can [illegible] it from many viewpoints and from many sides virtually at once. A simple, obvious statement that not only explains Picasso's art, but also clearly shows how the medium itself becomes an affective, content force.

Of course, the conveyor is the content, the medium is the message, just as the automobile is the message. Over and beyond its use to transport us places, the automobile, in itself, has changed our cultural patterns and personal and public behavior and development, as individuals and as a group.

Television coverage of Birmingham and Oxford and Selma did probably more than anything else to effect the passage of federal civil rights legislation. Even those people afflicted with the sickness of racial prejudice could no longer ignore what was going on about them, and had tp be ashamed, or at least concerned, with what they saw. Content, yes, but the medium itself created an effect aside from and beyond the content. A riot in the street, has one effect; it has far greater effect happening right in your own living room.

This is not to say that the medium replaces the content of the message.

It adds to it, it provides complementary and supplementary--and even seemingly unrelated--stimuli which make the content--the purpose in using the medium in the first place--more effective, more clear. And in addition, it carries with it its own role of affectivity.

Recently I was reading a review of a new edition of John Dewey's "Lectures in the Philosophy of Education," originally written in 1899. The review stated that Dewey's philosophy of education "has only a limited relevance to the problems in our schools and colleges that perplex us most." The implication, as I understood it, was that Dewey's stress on the socialization of the child--that is, the education that could put the child into an effective relationship with and control over his environment--was not entirely desirable or successful, as related to the potentials and needs in education. Unfortunately, the reviewer seems to be further away from the realities of education today than Dewey was 70 years ago. What are the desirable goals of education today? Combining the instrumentalist, rationalist and eclecticist philosophies, education's goals are, briefly, fourfold: to educate the student to achieve effecive participation as a citizen in the affairs of the world; to achieve self-realization; to acquire some degree of vocational efficiency; and to attain ethical and aesthetic growth.

Dewey could not do this, seventy years ago or even thirty years ago, except in a partial and limited way. Very simply, he could not take every student in every classroom into every corner of the outside world; and he obviously could not bring the world into the classroom.

I don't have to tell you that we are doing precisely that today in every classroom where the modern media of communication are present and are being used. The media themselves, affecting the very manner in which one responds and learns, constitute an additional message.

For example, let us look for a moment at the teacher-pupil relationship. We frequently find teachers and administrators who are afraid of television. I know of a Board of Education Audio-visual Director of one of our country's ten largest cities who refuses to develop or use television in instruction. He states that he has never seen anything good on ETV and that ETV has not demonstrated any value at all for education. In his already established neanderthal education philosophy, he would hardly accept the concept of the conveyor being the content. He would be horrified at the notion--which has been indicated through objective research--that TV provides a greater, more effective one-to-one relationship than does the traditional in-classroom situation. In the latter the teacher can make a one-to-one contact with one person at a time. Through television this relationship is with all the students all the time. The medium is, here, clearly the message.

But I don't want to talk to you today about this. Let's not belabor that subject. It is such an obvious truism that I am amazed and disturbed that so much of our energies recently have been taken up discussing as controversial or new something that we have known since communication first began and that is so simple that to make an issue of its borders on the ludicrous.

With the media's great advantages, there is also great danger. Mussolini once stated that without radio he would not have been able to achieve the control over the Italian people that he did. The question that we face, then, is what do we do about the control and proper utilization of the media so that we maximize its advantages and minimize its dangers.

In this regard I take strong issue with those who stress content, and with those who stress the medium, and also with those who stress an interdevelopment and use of both. The purpose of means and content is to educate the human being, to affect the thoughts, emotions and perhaps even actions of the human being. We consistently tend to lose sight of the fact that the most important factor, the raison d'etre for all of our efforts and machines and philosophies is this individual person, to whose needs all of our work and decisions should and must be oriented.

And the specific question, then, that I ask you here today, as directly as I can, is what do we intend to do about it in relation to our children. We are a child-oriented society--and yet those things that our children do most--such as watching television--we do the least about.

If its potential is to be used, indeed, for the advancement of human society, then, most of all, television belongs to our children. Television's primary efforts should be oriented today toward fulfilling the needs of our children in our attempt to educate them to be the kinds of citizens we want them to be tomorrow, to be the

kinds of individuals in their own personal orientations toward life and ideas that we hope they will be tomorrow, to be the kinds of people who can achieve and maintain an ever-peaceful prosperous world for all of humanity--the kinds of people we laud, that we ourselves clearly are not, and that we hope the new generation can somehow become.

Do we really believe this? If we do, then in our private sector of the home, for example, where we presumably can take actions in which we believe, we would never--never--allow a child to sit at a television set without a trustworthy interpreter.

For the child the television set is something of vast power. What else takes him into the world, what else brings the world--its experiences, thoughts, events, things, ideas, feelings--right to him.

About a year and a half ago, a then-four-year old of my acquaintance was busily pasting strips of cellophane tape across the dials of the television set in his home. When he had finished, he stepped back, looked at what he had done, and in a matter-of-fact confident voice, pleased with himself, he announced: "Now I control the world."

And he did.

The same child, now five and a half, was recently talking with a friend of his--the same age--about boats.

"You know what an anchor is?" he asked.

"Yes," his friend answered. "Its to hold a ship in place when they don't want it to go. My Daddy told me about it."

"My Daddy didn't tell me about it," my young acquaintance said. "He didn't have to. I saw it."

The medium changes not only the content, but the entire behavior and learning and growth patterns of our children. The child entering school who has watched TV--even non-selectively--is much better informed, all other things being equal--than the child who hasn't watched TV. But information is the least important of it. More important is the child's special awareness of visual observation and learning, his abilities to relate non-immediate, mediated experiences to live experiences and to print description, his openness to the utilization of media for learning development as well as being able to sit--maybe rightfully impatiently and uncomfortably--at the other end of the educational log.

But that all these things are possible, are probable, are actually happening, isn't enough. Because we have grown half a bough where none was before is no excuse for letting the child hang there in mid-air in the cradle, waiting for the bough to break and hoping that it won't.

The parents and mass media practitioners and educators--and surely every person here falls into at least one of those catagories--must all assume some responsibility for the child in relation to television.

We too often forget that the imaginations of children are broad, exciting, stimulating. It is only when we approach adulthood that we begin to conform, to restrict our minds and thoughts and feelings,

so dry up that most precious of creative potentials, to base educational progress on such irrelevant things as information examinations and IQ tests.

Because children's imaginations are so sharp, they are sometimes more critical than adults. It is true they can release themselves to be led into almost any fantasy, but unless they are psychologically disturbed--there has to be a valid believable base to begin with.

Many so-called children's shows attempt to capture the interest of parents and other assorted adults. This is fine, if it is not done for an ulterior reason. Indeed, in some cases the term "children's program" is a misnomer because many of these supposedly bi-oriented shows are really aimed at adults almost exclusively. If you watch the programs your children watch, and find them dull and tasteless, then quite likely that program is not going to enrich your child's day, develop his taste or be worth his time. One must differentiate between audience ratings and value. The child may "love" the program. But that is not the only criterion of its value, entertainment-wise or otherwise. The child may "love" candy, too--but a responsible parent (and, we hope, responsible public relations director, agency account executive, company vice-president, producer, director or writer) will not allow him to subsist on it all his waking hours.

Grace Stanistreet, one of the country's leading teachers of creative arts for children, has written about some of the responsibilities of children's theatre that may be applied just as validly to television.

"Many people with the responsibility of selecting programs for the young, watch the child at a children's play and take his reaction to it as the best recommendation. Would they take a child's word about what to include in the week's menus? Or what the family should wear, or when they should go to the dentist? But these things are fundamental to good living, they may protest. Is theatre [or television] different? Isn't exposure to cultural experience fundamental to good living?

"A child has no standards for judgment and evaluation. He is in the process of acquiring good habits, appetites, tastes, standards, by association, example, influence. The wise parent knows the part he must play in developing these in his child.

"He must select the exposures, the images, the experiences out of his greater knowledge of the child's needs and what will serve these needs. He does not impose his will, desires, purpose, taste but refers and defers at times to the child's purpose, desires and abilities. He makes decisions based on both, not solely on one or the other."

During the Federal Communications Commission's hearings on television in the fall of 1961, Melvin Helitzer, the advertising director of a toy manufacturer that spends 90% of its advertising budget on television, stated that one of the reasons for the failure of some shows written for children was that "the intelligence level of the writing was below that of the children." He said that "children are more intelligent than most adults believe," and that a program produced by people "who have no respect for children" was doomed to failure.

And we should add that those who have no respect for the fact that the television medium itself is content and in itself is having a profound effect on children, are dooming the children to failure.

We--virtually all of us here--are too old to have known television in our formative youth. Television arrived at an age--our age--when we were not quite so susceptible to its molding, although I think we must admit that as a medium it has affected us, too, to a great degree.

But because its greatest impact is on youth, and because our future depends on our children, I repeat that television is and should be for children. We must make certain that it provides the kind of content--as conveyor and as content--that the child needs. For example, at the rate at which knowledge is growing, by the time the child born today graduates from college, the amount of knowledge in the world will be four times as great. By the time that same child is fifty years old, it will be 32 times as great, and 97% of everything known in the world will have been learned since the time he was born.

Methods of teaching and learning as we now know them will be of dubious value. The entire concept of education must be changed, perhaps in a series of educational revolutions going far beyond the revolution from ancient to modern means that most of us like to believe is happening today. Not only must educational technology be properly used to make the student aware of and perhaps even understand some of the new knowledge of the world, but the media--their form, their use, their composition--must be used so that their existence as content, as message is most effective.

Our responsibility is twofold: first, to clearly recognize that the medium is the message, that the conveyor is the content in that the media in and of themselves have a profound effect on emotional, thought and behavior patterns, and that we must accordingly design and utilize these media with that in mind, making them and their use optimum in terms of our purposes of education. Second, to know that the most important factor in human progress--indeed, in survival--is the child, and that it is our children who stand to gain most--or to be harmed most--by the way in which our media are used and that, in this content, television, all educational technology, belong to our children.

Most audiences, no matter how strongly exhorted, are not in a position to accomplish anything directly. Usually they must go through a Congress or a school board or a group of stockholders. But here we do have people who are, in fact, in a position to make concrete and vast changes in the future of education if they so desire. And that is why I wish to impress upon you that educational media are perhaps even more important than you may think they are, that the medium is content for the child, and, most importantly, for those who are in position to do something about it, the corrolary: the message is--the medium!